

An Unpleasant Story

By CHEEVOR McKEE.

ORMSBEE took my last story but one from a box labelled *Read and Rejected*.

As a rule I do not play Peri at magazine editors' gates. Enclosing stamps is quicker and saves self-respect. But Ormsbee was a friend of mine before his transfiguration; and when he has explained why my last story is unavailable and my next one probably will be, we lunch together.

"Sit down and put your head back," he said. "If I hurt so you can't bear it, squeeze the bulb. This thing is carefully written, and you do get a certain effect. But I've told you fifty times that we're not in the market for unpleasantness."

"You had one by Kipling last month—"

"When you get to be Kipling, bring that in again and we'll talk. Meanwhile write us love stories. Nice little love stories, under 5,000 words."

An office girl came with a card.

"Oh, Lord—show him in," said Ormsbee. "No, you needn't go"—to me; "this won't take two minutes."

The big chair's leathern arms were comforting as a mother's. I had been writing all night, an evening paper man's only time for fiction. . . . But even at risk of rudeness Ormsbee's caller made me stare; a slight man, of any age you pleased, with a broad waxen black mustached face that was somehow familiar. Bowing, he laid a manuscript on the corner of Ormsbee's desk. Ormsbee took another from the box labelled *Read and Rejected*.

"Sorry," he said. "Your stories are well written, and you do get strong effects. But as I have told you, this magazine has no use for the unpleasant. Our readers get too much depression in life to want any more in fiction. Frankly"—Ormsbee looked over his tortoise shell rims as Rhadamantides, if he wears them, may be supposed to look—"frankly, I'm sorry to see a writer of your ability turning out a line of stuff so very hard to sell."

The caller's bow was faintly sardonic, I thought.

"This another of the same nature?"

The caller inclined his dark head.

"In that case I can give you no encouragement. For one thing, your persistent introductions of the Occult—Oh, no; please don't; please leave it here. I want to read it myself if you don't mind."

The caller's bow was still deeper than his last.

"My dear sir," said Ormsbee impulsively, "why not try your hand at love stories, nice little love stories, under 5,000—well, good morning."

For the caller, with a final bow worthy of Voltaire, had gone away. . . .

"All right! Come to!" Ormsbee slapped my knee. "That's over, thank heaven! Come along to lunch. Oh, hold on—got a treasure here to show you."

And he handed me the manuscript from the corner of his desk.

"Touch that with reverence. That's the original! We're going to make a facsimile for the January number. Greatest short story in English, if you ask me."

It was hand written, in the kind of hand people speak of as copper plate: *The Fall of the House of Usher*. . . .

Edgar James Swift's *Psychology and the Day's Work* (Scribner's) already in its sixth American printing, is being brought out in an English edition by Allen & Unwin.

\$750.00 IN PRIZES

\$500 For the BEST STORY

Article or Fiction

\$250 For the BEST CARTOON

On the Mexican Problem and the Remedy

Open to amateur and professional writers and cartoonists

Article must reveal true conditions, and suggest remedy (exclusive of military intervention). If fiction, must be based on facts and suggest remedy.

The cartoon should point a moral or suggest remedy (not military intervention). Sketches may be submitted.

Must be submitted before August 15th. The successful story and cartoon will be published in THE FORUM.

For further information address to the PRIZE EDITOR of the FORUM, 118 East 28th St., New York City.



Snell Smith, author of "America's To-morrow."

R. R. Yarns for R. R. Men

NEITHER those who travel day after day, week after week, and month after month, across the country on fast trains, nor for that matter, those who travel daily to and from their homes (commuters we call 'em)—often stop to think even for a moment of the man who pulls the throttle or the man who feeds the fires behind the boiler. But these are human beings like the rest of us, and are men to an exceptional degree.

Thus we learn from Frank L. Packard's latest book, *The Night Operator*. Mr. Packard has written many detective yarns, but this is not one of them. This volume contains ten "inside" stories of railroading. It pictures the life, ambitions, love, hatred, friendship, courage and heroism of the railroad man—from the loneliest night operator at the little signal station of Angel Forks all the way up to the master mechanic and the super and then beyond.

And Mr. Packard, who had a crack at civil engineering, even if he didn't get his C. E., surely deserves the honorary C. E. in fiction, on the merits of *The Wire Devils* and this latest, *The Night Operator*.

The title story is a very good one. Toodles is a newspaper, candy and magazine vender of vendors. He'd never even refuse a lead quarter, for if he took one it always managed to move along. So Toodles's story begins to get really interesting about the time he passes one on Hawkeye, the conductor. Hawkeye was sore, not because he had had a lead quarter gently slipped to him, but because Toodles, the little stunted paper boy, had done it. Enemies they had been, and if it were not for the big hearted, good natured Bob Donkin, Toodles would have suffered. But Donkin took Toodles in hand and at the end of the story we find Toodles already a station telegrapher, and grinding hard for a despatcher's pay.

The Apotheosis of Sammy Durgan, *The Wrecking Boss* and *The Age Limit* are three more stories worth note, in particular *The Age Limit*. In this we read of the broken hearted old timer—62 years of age is Dan MacCaffery—who was to lose his job on the first of the month, of course because of his age. After forty years of railroading it had come to this. So Dan, good old Dan, never even lost a smile over it, and on the last day, before

he went out on the run, he prayed to God, and that night his prayer was answered. Dan never lived to be fired.

In others the lighter and darker side of railroading is pictured in an easy, straight to the heart fashion, but we'd probably spoil a good thing by mentioning them here. At any rate Mr. Packard has done something very fine in *The Night Operator*, and we hope for more of this type.

THE NIGHT OPERATOR. By FRANK L. PACKARD. George H. Doran Company.

"Fernando"

THROUGH its first eight chapters John Ayseough's *Fernando* appears to be the beginning of a very delightful novel of manners graced by something we often hear about but not so often chance upon—real Irish humor. And then the actual purpose of the story appears in its true light, as being another part of the autobiography of the novelist and essayist who uses the above nom de plume for his title pages, although as the reading world knows very well by this time his name is Bickerstaff Drew, a Monsignor of the Catholic Church. John Ayseough has given us one part of his life as a boy in *Gracechurch*, a tale that took its title from an English village he lived in when a lad. Now he tells his readers of what his parents and their people were like before he came upon the scene, and in the last part of *Fernando* how that male child grew up and found the goal of his spiritual nature in the Catholic Church.

The English world that Hubert Burscough introduced his pretty Irish bride into, before *Fernando* Burscough was born, of course, was the sort of *Milieu* that reminds one of the *Cranford* style of novel if one could imagine such a story told with Irish wit. Mrs. Burscough, Hubert's mother, is the type of British dowager Bernard Shaw delights in painting at her worst, and that worst is displayed in her treatment of Sheila. Even the admiration for Sheila displayed by the Burscoughs' titled Irish neighbors, Lord and Lady Drumshambo, helped poor Sheila little. And when Hubert died the Burscoughs took one of his three young sons to care for, leaving the widowed Mrs. Burscough to bring up the others "on three pounds a month," a feat in domestic economy that arouses the wonderment of *Fernando*'s biographer fifty years afterward.

From this point in the story the hero's biography is the burden of the tale, a story of a solitary childhood for the most part with school and college days following on, culminating in *Fernando*'s becoming a Catholic while at Oxford. For this portion of *Fernando*'s biography has no ending, as the writer says in his dedication, it is merely "a preface—a preface to a book never to be written." We have spoken of Ayseough's delightful humor in the opening chapters. Of the charm of his style it is scarcely necessary to speak at this late day. But we note here something that we never remarked before and a curious quality for a prelate of the Church to own, his extraordinary facility for describing women's costumes, particular cases in point being the picture of Miss Prince at the Christmas party in the *Gracechurch* workhouse and also of Hussy Thrush's mother.

FERNANDO. By JOHN AYSEOUGH. P. J. Kenedy & Sons.

DANGEROUS DAYS by Mary Roberts Rinehart

Author of "H," "The Amazing Interlude," etc.

"One of the truly notable novels of American life. Charmingly written, moving, poignant, a brilliant study of married life."—*The Boston Globe*.
 "...and it succeeds beyond question. In all its essentials—it is a real masterpiece."—*Evening Sun*, New York.

At All Bookshops

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY Publishers New York

Silver and Gold

By DANE COOLIDGE

Anyone who has read "The Fighting Fool" or any other of this author's breezy Western stories, thrilling with adventure, knows that in this story of love and luck in a mining camp he will find a real man's book. Net, \$1.75

At all Bookstores. Postage extra.

E. P. DUTTON & CO.

681 Fifth Ave., New York.